(b) whether Government have conducted environmental studies regarding the effects on bio-diversity in the Gulf of Mannar due to implementation of this project; and

(c) whether Government have formulated any contingency plan to save rare bio-diversity in the Gulf of Mannar; if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) Yes, Sir. The commencement of work on Sethusamudram Ship Channel Project was inaugurated on 2nd July, 2005 and the project is scheduled to be completed in about three and a half years time. The estimated cost of the project is Rs. 2427.40 crores.

(b) Yes, Sir. A comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment Study has been carried out by the National Environment Engineering & Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur. The NEERI studied all the environment issues including ecological study, in depth, over a period of two years.

(c) Yes, Sir. Keeping in view the ecologically sensitive nature of the project, an elaborate Environment Management Plan has been drawn up to safeguard the bio-diversity of the region during project implementation and operation period.

Foolproof system for issuance of passports

468. SHRI S.P.M. SYED KHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are not having a foolproof centralized system in handling issuance and maintenance of passports whereas lndia is a global leader in the Information-Technology;

(b) if so, the reasons for not implementing/developing such a system keeping in view the increased number of frauds in the passport affairs;

(c) whether Government are going to inrroduce any new system for passports; and

(d) if so, details thereof including time frame if fixed?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) The passport issuance process in all Passport Offices in India is fully computerised. Several measures that have been taken to make the system more foolproof include issuance of machine-readable passports, computerisation of work process and setting up a central database for the purpose of checking and verification.

(b) to (d) Not applicable.

Bypass on NH-3

469. SHRIMATI MAYA SINGH: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD
TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Gwalior city by-pass on National Highway No. 3 is proposed to be built;

(b) if so, by when construction work is likely to be undertaken; and

(c) the target fixed for completion of work?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI K.H. MUNIYAPPA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The construction work is likely to be undertaken by April, 2006 and completed within a period of 24 months.

Clean-up drive by NHAI

470. DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:
SHRIMATI JAMANA DEVI BARUPAL: '

Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether National Highways Authority of India has launched a cleanup drive to strengthen internal processes and equip itself better to handle subsequent phases of prestigious National Highways Development Project;

(b) if so, whether seven contracts have been terminated due to poor performance and fraudulent practices by both Indian and foreign companies;

(c) if so, whether standardized documents performance guarantees, penalty clauses and third party audit's are some measures taken to ensure quality work; and